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St. Patrick's Day Is One of the Deadliest Days of the Year Because of Drunk Driving

Hiram, Georgia – March 16, 2014 – St. Patrick's Day brings to mind shamrocks, leprechauns, pots of gold and good luck. But no amount of luck can save you from a drunk-driving crash. Unfortunately, March 17th has become a deadly day in the United States, with a dramatic spike in drunk-driving fatalities. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, during the St. Patrick's Day weekend in 2013, more than a third (40%) of all crash fatalities involved drunk drivers. The night St. Patrick's Day, was especially bad. In the post-celebration hours between midnight and 5:59 a.m. March 18, half of all crash fatalities involved drunk drivers. And we're not just talking about a little bit too much to drink here; from 2009 to 2013, almost three-fourths of the drunk-driving fatalities on St. Patrick's Day involved drivers who were *twice* the legal limit. So whether you're buzzed or drunk on St. Patrick's Day, it doesn't matter. Drive sober.

In 2013, there were 31 people killed in drunk-driving crashes on St. Patrick's Day. During the St. Patty's Day period from 2009 to 2013, there have been 276 drunk-driving fatalities. Every one of those lives was lost because of bad decisions.

Chief Todd VandeZande offered this advice to partygoers: "Get ahead of the decision this year. If you know you're going to celebrate St. Patrick's Day with alcohol, then figure out a plan ahead of time for how you'll get home. Don't wait until you're too buzzed to decide, and don't let your friends drive drunk."

Buzzed Driving Is Drunk Driving, so if you have anything to drink, count on a sober friend, taxi, or public transportation to drive you home safely. Not drinking? Maybe this St. Patrick's Day, you'll be the saint who drives your friends sober.

The bottom line is this: Too many Americans fail to designate sober drivers. NHTSA is working hard to make sure every driver knows the dangers of getting behind the wheel after drinking. According to NHTSA, in 2013 on average one person was killed every 52 minutes in a drunk-driving crash in the United States. That totaled 10,076 drunk-driving fatalities that year. Let's make 2015 different. Use this party-planning checklist to stay safe this St. Patrick's Day.

NOW: Even if you don't have plans yet, plan to drive sober or designate someone else to. Save the number of a taxi company in your phone so you always have a backup plan.

WHEN YOU MAKE PLANS: A sober driver is an essential part of any party plan. Once you know where you'll celebrate, decide whether you're drinking *or* driving. You can only choose one.

ON ST. PATRICK'S DAY: Before you take your first sip of green beer, leave your keys at home or give them to a friend. If you're the designated driver, don't drink. Enjoy non-alcoholic beverages and brag about your VIP (very important partygoer) status online using the hashtag #designateddriver. Only drive sober or ride with a sober driver.

EVERY DAY: If you're impaired, use a taxi, call a sober friend or family member, or use public transportation to get home safely. If available, use your community's free ride program **Drive Sober, Georgia**. (Phone App. Android/Apple Device) If you know people who are about to drive or ride while impaired, take their keys and help them make other arrangements to get to where they are going safely.

Drunk driving has fatal consequences. If you see a drunk driver on the road, contact local police immediately. You could save a life. For more information, visit www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov.

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